

Teacher-Parent Collaboration for an Inclusive Classroom: Success for Every Child

Donnie Adams [1] , Alma Harris [2], Michelle Suzette Jones [3]

[1] Institute of Educational Leadership
University of Malaya, Malaysia
donnie.adamz@gmail.com

[2] Institute of Educational Leadership
University of Malaya, Malaysia
almaharris@um.edu.my

[3] Institute of Educational Leadership
University of Malaya, Malaysia
michellejones@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This article outlines the findings from a contemporary study of teacher-parent collaboration in inclusive education in primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. Recent inclusive education policy developments within Malaysia have increased teachers' accountability to effectively meet the needs of all students. This article draws upon recent empirical evidence on the impact of teacher-parent collaboration on inclusive education practices. It highlights some of the characteristics of an effective collaborative model and explores how far it contributes to a more inclusive classroom environment. The article also provides a contemporary insight into how teachers and parents view their collaborative roles in securing better student outcomes for students with special needs.

Keywords: *collaboration; inclusive education; communication; parents*

INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, special education programs have been monitored, regulated, evaluated, and critiqued by public officials, parents, and researchers interested in educational policy (Tiegerman-Farber & Radziewicz, 1998). Malaysia's active planning in special education began with its signing of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCOSS, 1994) which advocated inclusive education for all students. The Malaysian Education Act 1996 (1998) saw the introduction of inclusive education in response to The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (UNESCOSS, 1994) in which the need to address equal educational opportunity and access for all students including those with special educational needs (SENs) was highlighted. This inclusive model is focused on the child's right to equal education without discrimination and the school's responsibility to accept them, to provide appropriate facilities and support to meet the needs of SEN students (Lee, 2010).

This article explores how far collaboration as a creative partnership can be used by teachers and parents to achieve inclusion within a regular classroom by their (a) understanding about special educational needs; (b) willingness to communicate in matters pertaining to special educational needs; (c) perceived roles in implementing special educational needs; and (d) expectations of each other's role in implementing special educational needs. The article will be structured as follows. Initially, key findings from the research literature on teacher-parent collaboration will be outlined, the research methods will then be explained, and subsequently the findings from the data analysis will be presented and discussed.

Currently, only 6% of students with special needs are in inclusive programs. Some 89% attend integrated programs, and the remaining 5% attend special education schools (Ministry of Education, 2013). In 2012, the “Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025” was introduced to generate major transformation and improvement in Malaysia’s education system. Among the 11 Key Shifts for transformation and change, within the Blueprint, inclusive education was advocated for students with SEN, based on current national policy and international best practices. The Ministry of Education, Malaysia (2013) in its Malaysia Education Blueprint states it is committed to an inclusive education model and moving more students with SEN toward inclusion and that by 2021 to 2025, 75% of students with SEN will be enrolled in inclusive programs, all teachers will be equipped with basic understanding and knowledge of SEN, and high quality education will be provided to every child with special needs.

Inclusive education is seen as vital in assisting students with SEN in building friendship and gaining acceptance from others as well as providing quality education. According to Allen and Cowdery (2005), the benefits of inclusive education are as follows: firstly, it is the fundamental right of students no matter what their abilities and disabilities are to equal education; secondly, the opportunity to develop students’ social skills; and thirdly, the access to quality education. The Ministry of Education of Malaysia in view of making such social unity possible, decided to integrate students with SEN into the national schools as part of a reform initiative to educate the community, increase awareness on the educational rights of children and youth with SEN (Ali, Mustapha, & Jelas, 2006; Jelas & Ali, 2012). Many educators, parents and individuals with special needs welcome the fact that regardless of their special needs, pupils can attend school together with their peers (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Krahé & Altwasser, 2006).

Teacher-parent Collaboration

Developed and developing nations are progressing at different rates in implementing inclusive education (Helldin et al., 2011; Lee, 2010). There is relatively little evidence on inclusion in developing nations such as Malaysia (Lee, 2010). The empirical evidence about teacher-parent collaboration, its impact, and indeed any contemporary, independent evidence about inclusion in Malaysia remains limited. Consequently, this article outlines emerging empirical evidence about teacher-parent collaboration in Malaysia.

In their work, Mislan, Kosnin, and Yeo (2009) define collaboration as a process of two or more parties working together hand in hand to achieve a common objective and goal. Effective collaboration is based on all parties’ efforts in pursuit of similar goals. Collaboration is important for a reflection of practices and exchange of knowledge. It has been used as a main strategy to generate creativity and innovation for creating effective educational programs (Adams, 2005). Teachers face great challenges and often find it difficult to effectively meet the needs of all students (Narinasamy & Mamat, 2013). The creation of effective inclusive schools requires a combination of teachers’ and parents’ knowledge and skills on instructional strategies and assessment practices (Friend & Cook, 2007; Kampwirth, 2003). Many studies show that an inclusive school can be identified through its ability to work as a cohesive team (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975); the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments (EHAA, 1986), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments (IDEA, 1997), recognize teacher-parent collaboration as an essential component in effective special educational practices. The underlying assumption of such partnerships is that teachers and parents should work together to provide the child with the best education possible. In reality, however, many different ideas and beliefs among teachers and parents can arise that leads to a disconnection in relationships and communication among them. In such situations, fluid partnerships between teachers and parents can be challenging and resulting tensions can emerge which, in turn, can affect a child’s educational experience (Staples & Diliberto, 2010).

The collaborative team approach has emerged as a model for addressing the curricular needs of all children in the same classroom (Tanner, Linscott, & Galis, 1996). A collaborative approach between teachers and parents is based on its efficiency for decision making and its potential to produce high quality student

outcomes. Teacher-parent collaboration will optimize students' monitoring and learning which leads them to achieve their full potential and achievement (Lee et al., 2008; Reed, Osborne, & Waddington, 2012).

Studies in other countries suggest that teacher-parent collaboration is essential for teachers and parents to consult, undertake joint efforts and share information in providing efficient and meaningful education for students with SEN (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Hendersen & Mapp, 2002). Teachers and parents need to collaborate to identify what areas of students' development need attention and determine together appropriate goals and objectives to achieve (Carlisle, Stanley, & Kemple, 2005; Epstein, 2001). Work by Dettmer, Dyck, and Thurston (1999) further supports the need for a collaborative working team, stating its importance in accomplishing the goals of inclusion. Hallahan and Kauffman (1991) refer to collaboration as the formation of teams to aid the development of effective education and support for students with SEN. They expressed the need to create these teams as there might be insufficient human resources in schools.

Friend and Cook (2007) identified several key concepts that determine the success of teacher-parent collaboration. These concepts include realizing that collaboration should be voluntary, the need to share resources, being responsible in decision-making, aim toward common goals, acknowledge each other's roles, the ability to work together intuitively to plan a formal program process, and finally trust and respect for each other. It is very important that teachers and parents understand special educational needs and the Individualized Education Programme (IEP) content, and the processes involved in order to work as a team (Mislan, Kosnin, & Yeo, 2009).

Teacher-parent collaboration is more difficult to promote and maintain if teachers and parents work as separate units (Braley, 2012). Teachers and parents require active communication with each other for shared decision-making and ideas, to plan the IEP program and to discuss ways of improving student performance. Communication between teachers and parents therefore needs to be in a variety of forms and should not only be one-dimensional (Taylor, Smiley, & Richards, 2009). Lee and Low (2013) note that teachers' communication with parents is important for them to collaborate and share information. Effective communication between teachers and parents happens when both parties are honest and supportive of each other's responsibilities and roles (Unger, Jones, Park, & Tressel, 2001).

Research shows that teachers and parents need to collaborate to adjust more effectively to their responsibilities, their roles and their actions to continuously improve students' developmental outcomes (Bateman & Herr, 2006). Welch and Sheridan (1995) add that parents and teachers in collaborative relationships depend on one another equally and reciprocally. The process of "coming together" in education requires a re-evaluation and recreation of roles, responsibilities, and relationships. Teachers and parents need to recognize their shared interests and responsibilities for the student, and work collaboratively to create better opportunities for the student (Epstein, 1995).

According to Christenson (2002), sound educational outcome in teacher-parent collaboration relies on shared responsibilities. Cramer (2006) says teachers play a vital role by providing support to parents with the resources available inside and outside the classrooms and as executors of the educational plans while parents need encouragement to carry out their roles effectively in their child's development and academic performance. Successful student outcomes can be more easily achieved if both teachers and parents know each other's roles in the collaboration process.

Factors such as unclear role definitions between parents and teachers can impede the teacher-parent collaboration process effectiveness. The role of parents has always been an important topic in inclusive education practices (Braley, 2012; McDermott-Fasy, 2009). Past research indicates the reasons for parental involvement in the child's education (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005), and the different ways parents can become involved (Driessens, Smit, & Sleegers, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Wanat, 2010) and how parental involvement improves student's outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mislan et al., 2009; Wanat, 2010). For an effective collaboration, teachers' and parents' preconceived ideas on each other's role have to be put aside; instead everyone should focus on what is important in meeting the needs of the SEN

students. The American National Council on Disability (1996) underlines the importance of enhancing parental collaboration with teachers in shared decision-making for students with SEN.

A major concern for an inclusive process is the readiness of the students with SEN. These students need to undergo a transition from segregated special classrooms with low performance expectations to a more challenging mainstream education classroom with high outcome expectations. Teachers must understand the role of parents and collaborate with them as working partners to build reliable partnerships. It is crucial that both parties know what is expected of each other for more effective collaboration. Effective teacher-parent partnerships require a lot of patience, planning and structure in implementation (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2004). Factors in engaging teachers and parents in a collaborative partnership should therefore be clearly defined for successful SEN practices implementation. Various factors such as lack of role clarity between teachers and parents may disrupt SEN educational practice (van Hover, Hicks, & Sayeski, 2012).

Past research has elaborated teachers' and parents' perspectives on involvement in special education (Abidin, 2004; Alias & Salleh, 2004; Osman, 2003 Taib, 2008), studies on school-parent collaboration in special education (Salleh, Mahmud, & Jelas, 2003), teacher-parent collaboration in vocational program for learning disabilities (Sameon, 2004) and teacher-parent collaboration in the Individualized Education Program (Mislan et al., 2009). However, studies examining teacher-parent collaboration and extent of parental involvement in improving student's outcome at Malaysian inclusive education schools are limited. Therefore this study explores how far collaboration as a creative partnership can be used by teachers and parents to achieve inclusion within a regular classroom and further highlights what is required for this goal to be practically achieved. Inclusion is a continuous process of acceptance for individuals with special needs and the realization of their individual potential Success for inclusive education in the future is not simply a matter of sending students with special needs to regular classrooms and waiting for miracles to happen; it depends largely on collaboration between teachers and parents who are both responsible for the quality and access to meet the needs of these students.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach of sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative approach was used as the core method followed by qualitative approach to support the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 11). The rationale of this design is based on an assumption that the quantitative outcome of the study will be further explained by the qualitative data in exploring the collaborative process by the teachers and parents in the schools. Collins et al. (2006) reasoned that mixed-methods research may enrich the data and augment the interpretation of isolated experiences. In the current study, the data collection process was divided into two major phases. First, quantitative data were gathered using questionnaires; this was followed by collection of qualitative data using interviews.

Population and sample

The study was conducted in 10 Malaysian, government funded inclusive education primary and secondary schools located in Peninsular Malaysia. This selection was based on their active running and implementation of inclusive education practices in the schools. A survey instrument was administered to 95 teachers and 104 parents. Out of these 104, 68 parents' responses were selected for further data analysis. This selection was based on their frequency of attending the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings with the teachers.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study consists of four major constructs concerning the extent to which teacher-parent collaboration contributes to (a) understanding about special educational needs; (b) willingness to communicate in matters pertaining to special educational needs; (c) their perceived roles in implementing special educational needs; (d) expectations of each other's role in implementing special

educational needs. The instrument consists of 34 items using a five Point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Based on the teachers' and parents' responses, semi-structured interview sessions were carried out later with a sub sample of 6 teachers and 5 parents to explore further their experiences, roles and responsibilities in the collaboration process.

Data collection and analysis

The questionnaires were distributed to all selected teachers and parents. The questionnaires consist of a series of Likert-type questions that when combined measures a particular trait (Boone & Boone, 2012). Descriptive statistics consisting of mean scores were used to analyze data relating to the constructs concerning the extent to which teacher-parent collaboration contributes to their understanding, willingness to communicate, their perceived roles, and expectations of each other's role in implementing special educational needs. The interpretation of the level of collaboration was based on the following set of descriptors: 1.00–2.40 (low level of collaboration); 2.41–3.80 (moderate); and 3.81–5.00 (high). Data were analyzed descriptively (i.e., ranked from the highest level to the lowest level) before proceeding with the interview data.

Following the findings from the descriptive statistics, semi-structured interviews sessions were carried out later with a sub sample of 6 teachers and 5 parents to explore further their experiences in carrying out their roles and responsibilities in the collaboration process. The teacher interviewees were coded Teacher 1 to Teacher 6 and the parent interviewees were coded Parent 1 to Parent 5 to ensure confidentiality. Data obtained were analyzed using a constant comparative method, where data from the interviews, documents collected and observations were compared.

Results from both the quantitative and qualitative study were integrated. Integration refers to the stage or stages in the research process where the mixing or integration of the quantitative and qualitative methods occurs (Creswell, 2003). Specific quotes from the qualitative study will be highlighted to reinforce which are teachers' and parents' strongest collaboration constructs and which are not. This will allow better understanding of the initial quantitative data, adding more depth and richness to the study. The combination of these types of data provided a complementary and robust basis for analysis required for mixed methods design (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

RESULTS

This section of the article outlines the extent to which teacher-parent collaboration contributes to (a) understanding about special educational needs; (b) willingness to communicate in matters pertaining to special educational needs; (c) their perceived roles in the implementation of special educational needs; (d) expectations of each other's role in the implementation of special educational needs. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 depicting responses from 95 teachers who completed the questionnaire.

As shown in Table 1, it is interesting to note from this table that just over half of the teachers were aged 30 to 39 years, the majority had a Bachelor Degree academic qualification, and teachers in this study were largely very experienced with 30.5% having 6 to 8 years of experience working in the special education field.

Table 1: Teachers' demographic information

Demographic	Variables	Percentage	Total Respondents
Gender	Male	16.8	95
	Female	82.1	
Age	< 30 years old	25.3	95
	30 – 39 years old	53.7	
	40 – 49 years old	11.6	
	50 years and older	9.5	
Highest academic qualification	None	0	95
	Diploma	9.5	
	Bachelor Degree	78.9	
	Master Degree	9.5	
	Doctorate Degree	0	
	Others	1.1	
Area of specialization	Special Educational Needs	85.3	95
	Others	14.7	
Worked in the special education field	Less than 3 years	21.1	95
	3 to 5 years	24.2	
	6 to 8 years	30.5	
	9 to 11 years	10.5	
	More than 12 years	13.7	
	Non Applicable	0	
	Less than 3 years	23.2	
	3 to 5 years	27.4	
Involved in special education practices in this particular school	6 to 8 years	25.3	95
	9 to 11 years	11.6	
	More than 12 years	10.5	
	Non Applicable	0	

Table 2 shows the breakdown of parents' demographic information, in percentage. It is interesting to note from this table that the percentage of mothers (52.9%) and fathers (47.1%) that responded to the study were almost equal, parents who have no qualification ranked 2nd highest at 33.8% and parents were generally active attending their child's IEP meeting / discussion in the school.

Table 2: Parents' demographic information

Demographic	Variables	Percentage	Total Respondents
Gender	Male	47.1	68
	Female	52.9	
Age	Less than 30 years old	4.4	68
	30 to 39 years old	32.4	
	40 to 49 years old	47.1	
	50 years and older	16.2	
Highest academic qualification	None	33.8	68
	Diploma	39.7	
	Bachelor Degree	8.8	

Demographic	Variables	Percentage	Total Respondents
Child been studying in this school	Master Degree	1.5	68
	Doctorate Degree	0	
	Others	16.2	
	Less than 1 year	7.4	
	1 to 2 years	32.4	
	3 to 4 years	39.7	
Child involved in a (SEN) program	5 to 6 years	20.6	68
	Less than 1 year	7.4	
	1 to 2 years	38.2	
	3 to 4 years	29.4	
	5 to 6 years	22.1	
	None	0	
Attended the IEP meeting / discussion in the school	1 to 2 times	48.5	68
	3 to 4 times	29.4	
	5 to 6 times	7.3	
	More than 7 times	14.7	
	Less than 3 years	48.5	
	3 to 5 years	32.4	
Involved in SEN Practice in this school	6 to 8 years	8.8	68
	9 to 11 years	4.4	

Level of teacher-parent collaboration as perceived by teachers

The following Table 3 indicates which of the four teacher-parent collaboration constructs was the most prevalent among teachers. Based on the overall mean, it can be observed that teachers ($n = 95$) rated themselves highest on the “understanding about SEN” ($M = 3.65$), followed by their “expectations of parents’ role in the implementation of SEN” ($M = 3.57$), their “perceived roles in the implementation of SEN” ($M = 3.56$), and their “willingness to communicate in matters pertaining to SEN” ($M = 3.43$), respectively.

Table 3: Level of teacher-parent collaboration as perceived by teachers

Construct	Teachers' Mean
Understanding about SEN	3.65
Willingness to communicate in matters pertaining to SEN	3.43
Their perceived roles in implementing SEN	3.56
Expectations of each other’s role in implementing SEN	3.57

Six teachers were further interviewed in order to determine whether teachers perceived their understanding about SEN as the most vital element in a collaboration process with parents. Based on the interview, two teachers clearly showed special educational needs was a practice catered to the individual needs of the students with specific strategies and methods that are suitable for them. Teachers 1 (T1) and 4 (T4) mentioned:

“I observe these kids need a lot of guidance and help. We need to guide them in one to one learning. We need to use the strategies and methods that are suitable for them.” (T1)

“These students are different from normal students. They need a different learning style than mainstream education. SEN students need more attention from

the teacher and every lesson needs to be repeated so they always remember and master in an activity." (T4)

Interestingly, one of the teachers (T1) emphasized the need to understand the child better and suggested that this is done by meeting parents in school. She then elaborated:

"A special educational needs teacher needs a lot of patience and need a lot of learning from the student, and the parents too."

Teachers (T2, T5 and T6) also emphasized the need for interaction between the SEN students and mainstream students so that SEN students may increase in self-confidence. They mentioned:

"SEN student has low self-esteem and needs help from the mainstream students, normal people around them so they are able to increase their self-confidence." (T2)

"We want in this school as much as possible they're accepted. If they don't play together, how are they going to know each other?"(T5)

"The best SEN intervention is through interaction. Interaction within their peers, the SEN friends or together with the mainstream students encourages self confidence among the SEN students."(T6)

To summarize, the interviews with these teachers revealed teachers involved believed in equipping themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out special educational practices.

Level of teacher-parent collaboration as perceived by parents

Based on the perceptions and responses provided by parents, the level of teacher-parent collaboration are presented in Table 4. Parents ($n = 68$) rated themselves highest on the "expectations of teachers' role in the implementation of SEN" ($M = 3.86$), followed by their "willingness to communicate in matters pertaining to SEN" ($M = 3.77$), "their perceived roles in the implementation of SEN" ($M = 3.73$), and their "understanding about SEN" ($M = 3.69$), respectively.

Table 4: Level of teacher-parent collaboration as perceived by parents

Construct	Parents' Mean
Understanding about SEN	3.69
Willingness to communicate in matters pertaining to SEN	3.77
Their perceived roles in the implementation of SEN	3.73
Expectations of each other's role in the implementation of SEN	3.86

Five parents were further interviewed in order to determine whether parents perceived their expectations of the teachers' role in the implementation of SEN as the most vital element in a collaboration process with teachers. Based on the interview, three parents expressed that teachers had explained all the necessary information that they needed to know on their child. Parents appreciated teachers' efforts and thus would be more considerate in their expectations of teachers. Parents seemed to be rather contented with the service that teachers gave and showed in SEN implementation. Parent 3 (P3), Parent 4 (P4) and Parent 5 (P5) mentioned:

"The teacher categorize them you know. This kid, in this class. That kid, in that class. Like they do camping. They mix together. Mix with the normal kids. Like

sports also mix with the normal kids. From that aspect, the interaction has no problem. Teacher gives a lot of cooperation." (P3)

"Teachers will sometime inform they will teach something different like do some cakes, do some biscuits, something else students have to learn." (P4)

"At the special educational needs school here there is no problem." (P5)

In addition, all five parents voiced their satisfaction in the frequent attempts by teachers to communicate with parents through face to face meetings, WhatsApp and letters rather than just limit the communication attempt to just a phone call. They mentioned:

"When teachers see me when I'm sending my child to school, they will come to talk to me. What they need, what they want." (P1)

"You feel safe and secure when the teacher come and talk to you. Teachers here will attempt to come and talk to me even the negative side of my child." (P2)

"Teachers will inform the parents the school program, any activity via WhatsApp."(P3)

"Teachers usually will write a letter and pass to my child for me to attend meetings. Every meeting it's like this." (P4)

"Teachers give a letter for events or anything, they will invite. If there is anything, the teacher will call." (P5)

Parents in the study also acknowledged teachers' effort in guiding and educating their children by their confidence in allowing teachers to prepare their child's IEP learning objectives. Parent 2 (P2) and Parent 3 (P3) commented:

"They'll give me better suggestion to improve what I've done. They also tell me what they do in school so that I'll implement it at home with my child. So it has the same balance with the school activity." (P2)

"Regarding teaching styles also we ask for teachers' opinion. We would like it that way." (P3)

To conclude, parents have high expectations of teachers regarding their children's education. They suggest that parents' positive expectations have direct relation with the participation of SEN students in school activities.

DISCUSSION

This study has explored how far collaboration as a creative partnership can be used by teachers and parents to achieve inclusion within a regular classroom. It also examined teachers and parents': (a) understanding about special educational needs; (b) willingness to communicate in matters pertaining to special educational needs; (c) their perceived roles in implementing special educational needs; (d) expectations of each other's role in implementing special educational needs. The study further highlights what is required for this goal to be practically achieved.

The empirical analysis data showed that teachers believed that SEN activities needed to be custom made to meet the objectives determined for each student. This finding from this study is consistent with Huefner (2000) showing that as IEP is a program for individualized learning, this means it should also be

developed based on students' individual needs. Teachers needed to establish measurable goals that allow them to recognize students' performance achievement (Bateman & Herr, 2006).

In this study, teachers showed their willingness to learn from parents on the best practices and strategies to guide the SEN students. As Shea and Bauer (2003) and Yell (1998) suggest, teachers need to develop appropriate activities after gathering information about the child from their parents. This modification in instruction to best guide the SEN students is also a thrust in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) highlighting similar views as this study.

An inclusive approach toward SEN provided students with and without disabilities major social interaction benefits. Hwang and Evans (2011) similarly revealed that teachers demonstrated an understanding of the social function of inclusion by indicating that students without disabilities learned to accept and understand people who were different. Teachers in this study also understand the difference between integrating and truly including students with disability as they would want students with SEN to be accepted among their peers as much as possible. Desforges, Abouchara, and Britain (2003) also asserted that pupils' social development is influenced by parents, family, and their peer groups.

Parents in this study expressed that teachers had explained all the necessary information they needed to know on their child. Parents appreciated teachers' efforts and thus would be more considerate in their expectations toward teachers. Parents seemed to be rather contented with the service teachers gave in SEN implementation. Parents in the study also acknowledged teachers' effort in guiding and educating their children by their confidence in allowing teachers to prepare their child's IEP learning objectives. Research confirms this finding by showing that where understanding and good relations have been established, sharing of ideas and problems would be more possible, thus avoiding any disagreement (Salend, 2005). Collaborative work enables knowledge exchange and reflection on practice. Collaboration has proven to be the main contemporary strategy to feed innovation and creativity for effective educational programs (Guerrero, Mejías, Collazos, Pino, & Ochoa, 2003).

CONCLUSION

The underlying assumption of teacher-parent collaboration in special educational practices is that everyone who has a stake in a child's life, including the parents and teachers, should work together to give that child the best education possible. In reality, however, key stakeholders in a child's life may have many different ideas and beliefs, and, as a result, disconnection in communication and relationships among them can arise. In such situations, fluid partnerships between these stakeholders can be challenging and resulting tensions can emerge which can affect a child's educational experience (Staples & Diliberto, 2010).

While the sample in this study is clearly not representative, the evidence it provides is indicative and serves as a point of reference for educators and policy-makers interested in enhancing the inclusive classroom. This study on teacher-parent collaboration attempts to fill a gap in the literature, regarding parent-teacher collaboration in inclusive education in Malaysia. Various sources of evidence were gathered to explore this topic namely interviewing teachers and parents and giving out questionnaires. The views of teachers and parents provide interesting insights into how real collaboration had taken place at the schools.

The successful inclusive classroom requires collaborative interaction between teachers and parents. Perhaps, the process of collaboration itself reflects what inclusion is all about. Differences can be a strength in the creative process when they are collectively focused to accomplish a singular mission or goal. The diversity and difference of each individual in a collaborative team results in a creative synergy that could not be achieved by members individually. Teacher-parent collaboration provides the pathway to successful achievement of inclusive classrooms; however, an education system consisting of inclusive classrooms remains the final step in an educational journey.

REFERENCES

- Abidin, N. Z. (2004). Peranan ibu bapa dalam mendidik kanak-kanak berkeperluan khas. Prosiding Seminar Pendidikan Khas. Bangi: Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Adams, Karlyn. (2005). The sources of innovation and creativity. Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy. Retrieved from <http://www.fpspi.org/pdf/innovcreativity.pdf>
- Ainscow, M., & Sandill, A. (2010). Developing inclusive education systems: The role of organisational cultures and leadership. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(4), 401-416.
- Ali, M. M., Mustapha, R., & Jelas, Z. M. (2006). An empirical study on teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in Malaysia. *International Journal of Special Education*, 21(3), 36-44.
- Alias, A., & Salleh, N. M. (2004). Sokongan ibu bapa dan guru terhadap pendidikan kanak-kanak berkeperluan khas. Prosiding Seminar Kebangsaan: Pendidikan Awal dan Pendidikan Khas Kanak-Kanak. Bangi: Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Allen, E. K., & Cowdery, G. E. (2005). The exceptional child: Inclusion in early childhood education (5th ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Thomson/Delmar Learning.
- American National Council on Disability. (1996). Improving the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Making schools work for all of America's children. Washington, DC: National Council Disability (NCD).
- Bateman, B. D., & Herr, C. M. (2006). Writing measurable IEP goals and objectives. Verona, WI: Attainment.
- Beacham, N., & Rouse, M. (2012). Student teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and inclusive practice. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 12(1), 3-11.
- Boone, H. N., & Boone, D. A. (2012). Analyzing Likert data. *Journal of Extension*, 50(2), 1-5.
- Braley, C. (2012). Parent-teacher partnerships in Special Education. Honors Projects Overview. Paper 65. http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/honors_projects/65.
- Carlisle, E., Stanley, L., & Kempler, K. M. (2005). Opening doors: Understanding school and family influences on family involvement. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(3), 155-162.
- Christenson, S. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2001). School and families: Creating essential connections for learning. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Christenson, S. L. (2002). Supporting home-school collaboration. University of Minnesota: Children, Youth and Family Consortium.
- Collins, KMT, Onwuegbuzie, AJ & Sutton, IL (2006). A model incorporating the rationale and purpose for conducting mixed methods research in special education and beyond. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal* 4, 67-100.
- Couchenour, D., & Chrisman, K. (2004). Families, schools, and communities. Clifton Park, NY: Thomson/Delmar Learning.

- Cramer, S. F. (2006). *The special educator's guide to collaboration: Improving relationships with co-teachers, teams, and families*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Desforges, C., Abouchara, A., & Britain, G. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A review of literature*. London, UK: DfES.
- Dettmer, P., Dyck, N., & Thurston, L. P. (1999). *Consultation, collaboration, and teamwork for students with special needs*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Driesssen, G., Smit, F., & Sleegers, P. (2005). Parental Involvement and Educational Achievement. *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(4), pp. 509-532.
- EAHCA. (1975). *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, 20 U.S.C.
- Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701-712.
- Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder CO: Westview.
- Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2007). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Guerrero, L., Mejías, B., Collazos, C., Pino, J., & Ochoa, S. F. (2003). Collaborative learning and creative writing. In *Proceedings of the First Latin American Web Congress, 2003* (pp. 180-186). IEEE.
- Hallahan, D. P., & Kauffman, J. M. (1991). *Exceptional children: Introduction to special education*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Helldin, R., Bäckman, Ö., Dwyer, H., Skarlind, A., Hugo, A. J., Nel, N., & Müller, H. (2011). Opportunities for a democratic pedagogy: A comparative study of South African and Swedish teachers' attitudes to inclusive education. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 11(2), 107-119.
- Hendersen, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community connections on students' achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Laboratory.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C. L., Wilkins, A. S., & Closson, K. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *The Elementary School Journal*, 106(2), 105-130.

- Huefner, D. S. (2000). The risks and opportunities of the IEP requirements under IDEA'97. *Journal of Special Education*, 33(4), 195-205.
- Hwang, Y.-S., & Evans, D. (2011). Attitudes towards inclusion: Gaps between belief and practice. *International Journal of Special Education*, 26(1), 136-146.
- IDEA. (1997). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments. Public Law 105-17.
- IDEA. (2004). Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of. Public Law 108-446.
- Jelas, Z. M., & Ali, M. M. (2012). Inclusive education in Malaysia: policy and practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-13. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2012.693398
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
- Kampwirth, T. J. (2003). Collaborative consultation in the schools: Effective practices for students with learning and behavior problems. NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Krahé, B., & Altwasser, C. (2006). Changing negative attitudes towards persons with physical disabilities: An experimental intervention. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 16(1), 59-69.
- Lee, Jung-Sook, & Bowen, N. K. (2006). Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 193-218.
- Lee, L. C., Harrington, R. A., Louie, B. B., & Newschaffer, C. J. (2008). Children with autism: Quality of life and parental concerns. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 38(6), 1147-1160.
- Lee, L. W. (2010). Different strategies for embracing inclusive education: A snap shot of individual cases from three countries. *International Journal of Special Education*, 25(3), 98-109.
- Lee, L. W., & Low, H. M. (2013). 'Unconscious' inclusion of students with learning disabilities in a Malaysian mainstream primary school: Teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 13(3), 218-228.
- Malaysian Education Act 1996. (1998). (Act 550) Part IV, National Education System. Chap. 8. Kuala Lumpur: International Law Book Services.
- McDermott-Fasy, C. E. (2009). Family-school partnerships in Special Education: A narrative study of parental experiences. Boston College.
- Ministry of Education. (2013). Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. Retrieved from http://www.moe.gov.my/cms/upload_files/articlefile/2013/articlefile_003108.pdf
- Mislan, N., Kosnin, A. M., & Yeo, K. J. (2009). Teacher-parent collaboration in the development of Individualised Education Programme (IEP) for special education. *International Journal of Learner Diversity*, 1(1), 165-187.
- Narinjasamy, I., & Mamat, W. H. W. (2013). Caring teacher in developing empathy in moral education. *The Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Science*, 1(1), 1-19.

Osman, Z. A. (2003). Penglibatan ibu bapa dalam program pendidikan khas kanak-kanak bermasalah pembelajaran. (M.Ed project paper, national University of Malaysia, Bangi).

Reed, P., Osborne, L. A., & Waddington, E. M. (2012). A comparative study of the impact of mainstream and special school placement on the behaviour of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(5), 749-763.

Salend, S. J. (2005). Creating inclusive classrooms: Effective and reflective practices (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

Salleh, N. M., Mahmud, Z., & Jelas, Z. M. (2003). Kolaborasi antara ibu bapa dengan sekolah dalam Pendidikan Khas. *Laporan Projek Jangka Pendek GG/009/2001*. Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Sameon, N. (2004). Kolaborasi ibu bapa dan guru: Indikator kejayaan pendidikan vokasional dalam program integrasi pendidikan khas bermasalah pembelajaran. Prosiding Seminar Pendidikan Khas. Bangi: Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Shea, T. M., & Bauer, A. M. (2003). Parents and schools: Creating a successful partnership for students with special needs. Prentice Hall.

Staples, K. E., & Diliberto, J. A. (2010). Guidelines for successful parent involvement working with parents of students with disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(6), 58-63.

Taib, M. (2008). Pendidikan kanak-kanak bermasalah pembelajaran daripada perspektif penglibatan ibu bapa. Prosiding Seminar Kebangsaan: Pembelajaran diversiti. Bangi: Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Tanner, K., Linscott, D. J., & Galis, S. A. (1996). Inclusive education in the United States: Beliefs and practices among middle school principals and teachers. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 4(19), 1-60.

Taylor, R. L., Smiley, L. R., & Richards, S. B. (2009). Exceptional students: Preparing teachers for the 21st century. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Tiegerman-Farber, E., & Radziewicz, C. (1998). Collaborative decision making: The pathway to inclusion. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

UNESCOSS. (1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. UNESCO.

Unger, D., Jones, C. W., Park, E., & Tressell, P. A. (2001). Promoting parent involvement among low-income single caregivers and urban early intervention programs. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 21, 197-212.

van Hover, S., Hicks, D., & Sayeski, K. (2012). A case study of co-teaching in an inclusive secondary high-stakes World History I classroom. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 40(3), 260-291.

Wanat, C. L. (2010). Challenges balancing collaboration and independence in home-school relationships: Analysis of parents' perceptions in one district. *School Community Journal*, 20(1), 159-186.

Welch, M., & Sheridan, S. M. (1995). Educational partnerships: Serving students at risk. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace.

Yell, M. L. (1998). The law and special education. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.